

# Reader's Guide and Summary

## Reader's Guide

The Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument (Monument) Proposed Resource Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement (Proposed RMP/Final EIS) was prepared under the guidance of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act and the National Environmental Policy Act.

The Proposed RMP/Final EIS is organized into five chapters and the appendices. The five chapters detail the introduction, alternatives, affected environment, environmental consequences, and consultation and coordination. The appendices include supporting information for some of the topics discussed in Chapters 1 through 5 that would be too lengthy to include under a specific section.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 1 introduces the information discussed throughout the remainder of this document for the Monument. This chapter discusses why the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is preparing this Proposed RMP/Final EIS, how the public was involved in this planning process, how issues were defined and a number of other topics. The information in this chapter is organized into the following headings:

- Background
- Purpose and Need
- Planning Area
- Collaboration
- Planning Process
- Scoping
- Issues Addressed
- Issues Considered but Not Analyzed Further
- Planning Criteria
- Related Plans
- Relationship to BLM Policies, Plans, and Programs
- Vision and Management Goals
- Development of Alternatives
- Draft Resource Management Plan
- Final Resource Management Plan

## Chapter 2: Alternatives

Chapter 2 details six alternatives for managing the Monument to meet the purpose and need, the vision and management goals, and to address the issues discussed in Chapter 1. Each alternative represents a reasonable set of objectives and actions to guide future management of the Monument. This chapter is presented in five sections:

- General Description of Each Alternative
- Decisions Common to All Alternatives
- Current Management and Action Alternatives
- Alternatives Considered but Not Analyzed in Detail
- Comparison of Alternatives

This chapter has two main components. One is the section on Decisions Common to All Alternatives, beginning on page 16, which includes existing decisions that will be carried forward into each alternative described further in the chapter.

The other main component is Current Management and Action Alternatives, beginning on page 38, which provides a detailed description of the six alternatives. Two main tables are also associated with Chapter 2: a summary comparison of the alternatives (Table 2.41 on page 129) and a summary of the environmental consequences (Table 2.42 on page 156).

The information relating to the alternatives, affected environment and impact analysis is organized into four broad categories throughout this document. This category format is introduced in Chapter 2 and used again primarily in Chapter 4. The categories are intended to group similar resource discussions and to provide another means of organizing the information in this document for the reader's convenience. The four categories are described below.

The *Health of the Land and Fire* section includes management guidance that would apply to most resources and resource uses in the Monument and includes alternatives for fish and wildlife; vegetation; range improvements; visual resources; forest products; right-of-way corridors, avoidance areas and exclusion areas; land ownership adjustment; fire; and eligible wild and scenic rivers.

The *Visitor Use, Services, and Infrastructure* section includes management for recreation in the Monument. This section includes alternatives for recreation management areas; fees; gateway communities; research, collection, and special events; recreation in sensitive wildlife habitat; potential interpretive sites; special recreation permits; opportunities for boaters; camping facilities; and motorized watercraft.

The *Natural Gas Exploration and Development* section includes management guidance for the existing oil and gas leases in the Monument. This section includes alternatives for the West HiLine and non-West HiLine oil and gas leases that include timing, controlled surface use and no surface-disturbing or disruptive activities; and

alternatives for seismic; drilling operations; production facilities and equipment; and reclamation.

The *Access and Transportation* section includes management guidance for the transportation system in the Monument. This section includes alternatives for access; the BLM road system; and aviation.

Chapter 2 begins on page 13.

## Chapter 3: Affected Environment

Chapter 3 contains a description of the physical, biological, cultural, economic and social conditions of the Monument. It includes a description of the resources and resource uses in the Monument, including the objects identified in the Proclamation (Appendix B) and a list of many of the natural resources on BLM land in the Missouri Breaks (Appendix C). Most of the information in this chapter is summarized from the Analysis of the Management Situation (BLM 2003b) that is available for review at the Lewistown Field Office. The affected environment serves as the baseline of existing conditions from which the impacts of the alternatives may be analyzed. This section provides the information to understand the effects of the alternatives.

Chapter 3 begins on page 175.

## Chapter 4: Environmental Consequences

Chapter 4 describes the environmental, economic and social consequences of implementing the alternatives presented in Chapter 2. The impacts were identified and evaluated by an interdisciplinary team of resource specialists and are presented here by resource and alternative (Chapter 3 provides a detailed description of each resource). Impacts are quantified, where possible, in magnitude, duration and intensity.

Chapter 4 is presented in five sections:

- Analysis Assumptions and Guidelines
- Impacts from the Alternatives (including Impacts Common to All Alternatives)
- Unavoidable Adverse Impacts
- Short-Term Use versus Long-Term Productivity
- Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources

The environmental impacts of the alternatives are summarized in Table 2.42 at the end of Chapter 2.

Chapter 4 begins on page 271.

## Chapter 5: Consultation and Coordination

Chapter 5 includes a description of the public involvement opportunities, consultation and coordination with tribal governments, state and local governments, including those with Cooperating Agency status, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Central Montana Resource Advisory Council.

While no tribes became an official cooperating agency, coordination has continued through letters, updates, and meetings. Comments received from tribal governments or tribal members regarding the Draft RMP/EIS during meetings, government-to-government consultation, and letters are included, along with BLM's responses to the comments.

The agencies, organizations, and businesses receiving the document are listed, along with a brief introduction of the preparers of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS. This chapter also includes the public comments received from individuals, agencies, organizations and groups on the Draft RMP/EIS and BLM's responses to the comments.

Chapter 5 begins on page 469.

## Appendices

The appendices are lettered and organized as they are referenced in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS. Each appendix may contain several pieces of information related to the topic covered.

The Appendices begin on page 1265 and include:

- A Resource Advisory Council Recommendations, 1999
- B Proclamation 7398 of January 17, 2001
- C Natural Resources on BLM Land, Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument
- D Governor's Task Force Recommendations
- E Scoping Issues
- F Issues Considered but Not Analyzed Further
- G Vision and Management Goals
- H Implementation and Monitoring
- I Federal and Montana Ambient Air Quality Standards
- J Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management
- K Best Management Practices
- L Cultural Resource Use Categories
- M Watershed Planning Process
- N Grazing Allotments
- O Oil and Gas
- P Wild and Scenic River Eligibility and Suitability Report

Q	Visitor Use Standards and Indicators
R	Wildlife
S	Soil Survey Geographic (SSURGO)
T	Important Vegetation Species Found in Riparian Areas
U	Noxious/Invasive Plant Species at Recreation Sites
V	Rights-of-Way
W	Economic Tables Showing Industry Output, Employment, Income, and Income per Job by North American Industrial Classification System (NAICS) Division for the Five Counties in the Study Area
X	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Concurrence

## Maps

The Proposed RMP/Final EIS includes thirteen (11x17) foldout maps following Chapters 2 and 3, and five larger foldout maps located in the back pocket following the Appendices. Several other maps are referenced in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS. Those maps can be found on the following website: [http://www.blm.gov/mt/st/en/fo/lewistown\\_field\\_office/um\\_rmp\\_process.html](http://www.blm.gov/mt/st/en/fo/lewistown_field_office/um_rmp_process.html).

## Summary

### Purpose and Need

The purpose of this Proposed RMP/Final EIS, as required by the Proclamation (Appendix B), is to provide a comprehensive plan for managing the Monument and site-specific, detailed plans for managing transportation, visitor use, and oil and gas leases in a manner that protects the objects identified in the Proclamation, while recognizing valid existing rights. The Proclamation requires that the BLM manage the Monument in order to implement the purpose of the Proclamation. The purpose of the Proclamation is to set apart the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument, for the purpose of protecting the objects, which include, but are not limited to the following: the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail, Nez Perce National Historic Trail, and Cow Creek Area of Critical Environmental Concern; elk, bighorn sheep, greater sage-grouse, prairie dogs, mule deer, and their respective habitats; cottonwood gallery forest ecosystems; fish, including paddlefish populations and pallid sturgeon; birds and their habitat, including falcons, eagles, and hawks; archaeological, historic, and cultural sites, including trails and homesteads.

There is a need for this Proposed RMP/Final EIS because the existing management of the Monument, governed by the West HiLine RMP (BLM 1988, 1992a), Judith-Valley-Phillips RMP (BLM 1994a), Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River Management

Plan Update (BLM 1993) and the State Director's Interim Guidance for Managing the Monument (BLM 2001a), may not always provide for the administration of the Monument in a manner that will sufficiently protect the objects as identified in the Proclamation.

## Issues Addressed

The preliminary issues were identified in the Preparation Plan for the RMP (BLM 2002c). They were identified by the BLM and other agencies at meetings, and/or were suggested by individuals and groups by way of phone calls, emails, letters and past meetings concerning the proposed designation. They represented the BLM's expectations (prior to scoping) about what concerns or problems exist with current management. The preliminary issues were included in a June 2002 newsletter and displayed during the scoping open houses in July and August 2002. They were then modified based on the scoping comments and expanded to include a new issue: economic and social conditions (BLM 2002a).

From data collection and analysis perspectives, some of the following six issues overlap one another, and each contains a number of different sub-issues which address more specific uses and resources related to the topic. Appendix E presents more detailed information about these issues.

### How will human activities and uses be managed?

The Monument provides a variety of activities and uses. Recreational activities include motorized and non-motorized touring; upland game bird and big and small game hunting; backpacking; horseback riding; sightseeing; pleasure driving; river floating; motorized river boating; and the backcountry use of small fixed-wing aircraft on primitive landing strips. A subgroup of the Central Montana RAC addressed visitor use recommendations for the river portion of the Monument. The designation of the Bear Paw Battlefield National Park in 2005 may result in increased use along the Nez Perce National Historic Trail. The BLM Missouri Breaks Interpretive Center in Fort Benton, which opened in 2006, focuses on Monument values and uses both on the Missouri River and in the uplands.

Commercial guides and outfitters, operating under special recreation permits from the BLM, provide services related to some recreational activities such as hunting and river floating. Increased visitation has led to increased demands for visitor services, requests for outfitter permits, requests for aerial tours of the Monument, and a higher demand for emergency services such as search and rescue.

A number of non-recreational uses also occur in the Monument, including rights-of-way for roads, utility

lines and communication sites, livestock grazing, etc. All of these activities have an effect on the area's environment and on local communities surrounding the Monument. Careful management of these activities is crucial to protecting the Monument resources.

In some instances, such as oil and gas leasing within the Monument, valid existing rights are in effect and must be recognized in the RMP. In March 2000, the Montana Wilderness Association filed suit challenging BLM's issuance of three of these leases, alleging the BLM did not fully comply with NEPA, the Endangered Species Act, and the National Historic Preservation Act. In March 2004, the Montana Federal District Court ruled in favor of the plaintiffs and ordered the BLM to prepare an EIS for the oil and gas leasing program that covers the three leases. In January 2006, the District Court enjoined activity on the three leases until BLM could demonstrate compliance with the directives set forth in the March 2004 order. The leases involved in the suit, as well as nine others in the Monument, were based on the BLM's 1988 West HiLine RMP. In light of the court's ruling, the BLM believes all 12 Monument leases based on the West HiLine RMP should be analyzed in this Monument RMP. This RMP will consider the current stipulations that apply to the 12 leases issued under the West HiLine RMP, and the conditions of approval or mitigating measures that should be applied to surface occupancy and surface-disturbing activities associated with all 43 oil and gas leases in the Monument, which cover about 42,000 acres. To fully comply with the January 2006 court order, this RMP also addresses a no lease alternative for the 12 West HiLine leases. The no lease alternative is addressed as a subalternative, Alternative E<sub>NL</sub>, which would not allow surface disturbance or the processing of applications for permits to drill (APD).

#### **What facilities and infrastructure are appropriate to provide visitor interpretation and administration of the Monument?**

The planning area is characterized as a predominantly natural environment with few facilities for the comfort and convenience of visitors other than those along the Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River (UMNWSR). Currently, the BLM has an interpretive center and offices located in Fort Benton, and a variety of recreation sites along the UMNWSR. Additional facilities may be needed for visitor safety and information, and to address human sanitation, vehicle use and other resource uses and impacts.

#### **How will the BLM manage resource uses and protect the biological, historical, cultural, and visual values of the Monument?**

Various ways of protecting resources include enforcing existing laws and regulations, educating visitors,

managing access, setting management and research priorities, suppressing wildfires and managing fuels, restoring degraded ecological conditions, or some combination of these approaches.

Some of the Monument's major resources that require BLM management decisions include cultural, recreation, riparian communities, vegetation and water resources, as well as biodiversity and wildlife habitat.

#### **How will Monument management be integrated with other agency and community plans?**

The BLM has a strong commitment to work with other agencies and communities in managing the Monument. Coordination with state agencies that have jurisdiction over resources within the Monument is essential for effective management. These agencies include Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, and the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation.

Monument objectives call for a significant portion of visitor services related to the Monument to be located in the surrounding communities rather than within the Monument. In order to do this, a good working relationship with local tourism and service providers must be developed and maintained. Agreements with the local counties and communities for coordinating activities and needs such as planning, transportation, emergency services (i.e., search and rescue), law enforcement, infrastructure and tourism need to be explored.

#### **How will transportation and access be managed?**

A network of local, collector and resource roads currently provides access to many areas of the Monument. County roads are routinely graded and maintained by Blaine, Chouteau, Fergus and Phillips Counties, while BLM-managed routes receive various levels of maintenance based on a BLM maintenance schedule. The current road system may not be adequate or may require modifying to increase protection for resources in the Monument, address conflicts of use, and/or provide improved travel opportunities.

#### **How will Monument management affect economic and social conditions in the area?**

The Monument can provide tourism, hunting, and other forms of recreation while bolstering the economy of Montana. Monument management must recognize the continuation of existing land ownership and the economic activities that are dependent on the land and its natural resources.

### **Vision and Management Goals**

The BLM's vision is to manage the Monument in a manner that maintains and protects its biological,

geological, visual and historic objects and preserves its remote and scenic character. The RMP will incorporate the Proclamation, multiple use and existing laws, while recognizing valid existing rights and authorizations, and providing diverse recreational opportunities.

A number of management goals guided the development of alternatives for this RMP. These goals are the result of information provided through public scoping, existing laws and regulations, the Proclamation, and the planning team. These goals include:

- Manage visitor use and services on these BLM lands in a manner that protects Monument values and resources.
- Manage these BLM lands in a multiple use manner consistent with the Proclamation and all current law and policy.
- Manage legal and physical access to and within the Monument to provide opportunities for diverse activities.
- Manage these BLM lands for a variety of sustainable visitor experiences in mostly primitive and natural landscapes.
- Manage these BLM lands in a manner that provides a healthy ecosystem supporting plant and animal species and achieves a sustainable variation of native vegetation communities.
- Manage these BLM lands in a manner that provides current and future generations with the social and economic benefits compatible with the Proclamation.
- Manage these BLM lands in a manner that involves the public and collaborating agencies (local, state, federal and tribal) at every opportunity.

## **General Description of Each Alternative**

The six alternatives provide a reasonable range of management options to resolve the issues identified for the Monument. The alternatives provide a range of more-intensive to less-intensive management. The following brief descriptions provide an overview of the alternatives developed and some of the unique aspects of each.

### **Alternative A (Current Management)**

Alternative A emphasizes continuing the management that already occurs in the Monument. This is now

governed by the West HiLine RMP (BLM 1988, 1992a), Judith-Valley-Phillips RMP (BLM 1994a), Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River Management Plan Update (BLM 1993) and the State Director's Interim Guidance for Managing the Monument (BLM 2001a) to the extent these plans are consistent with the Proclamation. This is the "no action" alternative that would create no change from the current management direction.

Motorized use on the river would continue with the seasonal limitations on upstream travel and a no-wake speed restriction in the wild and scenic segments of the UMNWSR. The number of boaters on the river would not be limited, and no allocation system would be developed. About 524 miles of roads would be open to motorized travel yearlong, 68 miles would be open seasonally, and 10 backcountry airstrips would remain open.

Current stipulations would apply to the 12 West HiLine oil and gas leases, and conditions of approval for applications to drill natural gas wells would be developed and considered on a case-by-case basis during the permitting process on all 43 oil and gas leases. It is foreseeable that 35 wells could be drilled on these leases in the Monument.

### **Alternative B**

Alternative B emphasizes more intensive recreation and transportation management. Resource management would allow camping facilities and interpretive sites at varying levels to enable visitors to experience both the natural and historic benefits of this Monument, while ensuring that resource protection is not compromised.

Motorized use on the river would be allowed yearlong on all segments. The number of boaters on the river would not be limited, and no allocation system would be developed. About 477 miles of roads would be open to motorized travel yearlong, 96 miles would be open seasonally, and 10 backcountry airstrips would be designated open.

Alternative B would be the least restrictive alternative concerning oil and gas activity. Reasonable conditions of approval would protect the objects for which the Monument was designated and 44 natural gas wells could be drilled on the existing leases in the Monument.

### **Alternative C**

Alternative C would emphasize providing visitors with opportunities to experience the Monument. This alternative is distinguished from Alternative B in that it would more readily identify and accommodate changing conditions over time through the application of

management decisions responsive to these changing conditions. This alternative provides more flexibility to respond to increasing visitation and risks to resources that could occur over time.

Motorized use on the river would be allowed with seasonal limitations on upstream travel and a no-wake speed restriction in the wild and scenic segments. Standards and indicators would be used to manage boaters on the river and impacts to resources, and no allocation system would be developed. About 439 miles of roads would be open to motorized travel yearlong, 95 miles would be open seasonally, and seven backcountry airstrips would be designated open.

Management of oil and gas operations would be more restrictive under this alternative, allowing less activity to occur than Alternatives A, B and F. Existing lease stipulations would be strengthened by implementing reasonable conditions of approval under BLM's authority to protect the objects for which the Monument was designated. It is foreseeable that 28 natural gas wells could be drilled on the existing leases in the Monument.

## **Alternative D**

Alternative D would also emphasize providing visitors with opportunities to experience the Monument, but in a more self-directed fashion. This alternative differs from Alternative C in that it would limit certain activities now rather than applying management decisions responsive to changing conditions.

Motorized use on the river would be allowed with seasonal limitations on upstream travel and a no-wake speed restriction in the wild and scenic segments. Standards and indicators would be used to manage boaters on the river and impacts to resources, and an allocation system would be developed when those standards and indicators are exceeded. About 292 miles of roads would be open to motorized travel yearlong, 44 miles would be open seasonally, and six backcountry airstrips would be designated open.

Management of oil and gas operations would be more restrictive under this alternative, allowing less activity to occur than Alternatives A, B, C and F. Existing lease stipulations would be strengthened by implementing reasonable conditions of approval under BLM's authority to protect the objects for which the Monument was designated. It is foreseeable that 13 natural gas wells could be drilled on the existing leases in the Monument.

## **Alternatives E and E<sub>NL</sub>**

Alternative E would emphasize the natural condition and place the most limitations on visitors and other activities.

Motorized use would not be allowed on any segment of the river. An allocation system would be developed to manage boaters on the river and impacts to resources. About 103 miles of roads would be open to motorized travel yearlong, 4 miles would be open seasonally, and no backcountry airstrips would be designated open.

Management of oil and gas operations would be most restrictive under this alternative, allowing no activity to occur on the existing leases within the Monument. Surface disturbance would not be allowed on the 12 West HiLine oil and gas leases or the other 31 existing oil and gas leases. This alternative would also consider the environmental effects of not leasing the 12 West HiLine leases or the No Lease Alternative; a sub-alternative identified as Alternative E<sub>NL</sub>. Under Alternatives E and E<sub>NL</sub> it is foreseeable that no natural gas wells would be drilled on these leases in the Monument.

If either of these alternatives was selected as the approved plan, there would be legal implications since the oil and gas leases have valid existing rights. These implications are outside the scope of an RMP, which addresses environmental effects. The legal implications would be addressed in a record of decision.

## **Alternative F (Preferred Alternative)**

Alternative F would emphasize providing visitors with opportunities to experience the Monument. This alternative would readily identify and accommodate changing conditions over time through the application of management decisions responsive to these changing conditions. Through implementation and monitoring this alternative provides more opportunities to respond to increasing visitation and risks to resources that could occur over time.

Motorized use on the river would be allowed with seasonal limitations on upstream travel and a seasonal no-wake speed restriction in the wild and scenic segments of the UMNWSR from June 15 to September 15. In addition, the wild and scenic segment from Holmes Council Island to the Fred Robinson Bridge would be restricted to non-motorized watercraft from June 15 to September 15 on Sunday through Wednesday. Standards and indicators would be used to manage boaters on the river and impacts to resources and no allocation system would be developed.

About 293 miles of roads would be open to motorized travel yearlong and 111 miles would be open seasonally. Five backcountry airstrips would be designated open yearlong and one airstrip would be open seasonally. Seasonal restrictions include 81 miles for wildlife habitat security during the fall and these roads would be available for big game retrieval from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Management of oil and gas operations would be more restrictive under this alternative, allowing less surface-disturbing activity than Alternatives A or B. Existing lease stipulations would be strengthened by implementing reasonable conditions of approval under BLM's authority to protect the objects for which the Monument was designated. It is foreseeable that 34 natural gas wells could be drilled on the existing leases in the Monument.

## Preferred Alternative

The following section describes the Preferred Alternative (Alternative F) for the Monument. Please refer to Chapter 2 for Decisions Common to All Alternatives, a complete description of the six alternatives, and Tables 2.41 and 2.42 for a summary comparison of alternatives and summary comparison of environmental consequences.

## Health of the Land and Fire

### Fish and Wildlife – Greater Sage-Grouse Habitat

*The BLM's goal is to manage, enhance and protect the fish and wildlife habitat and habitat for special status species.*

Sage-grouse management would utilize the 2005 Management Plan and Conservation Strategies for Sage-Grouse in Montana – Final for overall guidance and direction.

The BLM would consider mechanical treatment as the primary method and prescribed fire as a secondary method to remove conifers encroaching on sage-grouse habitat, except where forested habitat is limited.

This alternative would require grazing permittees to avoid the placement of salt or mineral supplements near leks during the breeding season (March 1 to June 15). The placement of salt or mineral supplements by other entities would not be allowed. Supplemental winter feeding would not be allowed on sage-grouse winter habitat and around leks.

This alternative would promote sage planting, where appropriate, on project areas (such as sites where sagebrush has been removed for crested wheat grass conversions) occurring within sage-grouse habitats and would reclaim and/or reseed areas disturbed by treatments.

Concentrations of livestock near leks or winter habitat can disturb or displace sage-grouse. Therefore, concentrations of livestock on leks or other key sage-grouse habitats could be avoided by using conservative

stocking levels, locating salt or other supplements away from leks or winter habitat, adjusting grazing seasons and locating water facilities where they would not jeopardize habitat.

### Fish and Wildlife – Black-tailed Prairie Dogs

*The BLM's goal is to manage, enhance and protect the fish and wildlife habitat and habitat for special status species.*

Prairie dog management would utilize the Conservation Plan for Black-Tailed and White-Tailed Prairie Dogs in Montana (Montana Prairie Dog Working Group 2002) for overall guidance and direction. Regional plans (based on Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks administrative regions) would be utilized when they are completed.

Prairie dog towns would be allowed to expand as long as they are not adversely impacting adjacent private or state land, other resources, or affecting Standards for Rangeland Health. Prairie dog towns would be adversely impacting other resources, and controls could be considered, if the towns are:

- The source of or an exacerbation of invasive or noxious plants;
- Substantially limiting forage and/or important habitat for wildlife species in the immediate area;
- Substantially limiting forage for livestock in the immediate area;
- Overriding the effectiveness of other management measures; or
- Posing a substantial economic hardship or risk for other landowners, resulting from the need to control populations on private or state land because of prairie dogs on adjacent BLM land.

Controls would not occur where mountain plover or burrowing owls have been documented using established habitat. Prairie dogs could be reestablished on historic towns that have been eradicated or that have died out due to sylvatic plague. Specific actions to address adverse impacts to or from prairie dogs would be addressed through the watershed planning process and/or a site-specific environmental assessment.

### Fish and Wildlife – Mitigation

*The BLM's goal is to manage, enhance and protect the fish and wildlife habitat and habitat for special status species.*

The following mitigating measures would be applied to new surface-disturbing or disruptive activities for

identified/important wildlife habitat in the Monument. Mitigating measures would be applied on a case-by-case basis during activity level planning after an on-site evaluation of the project area indicates the presence of a species. Exceptions to these mitigation measures may be granted by the authorized officer if an environmental review demonstrates there would be no adverse impacts, habitat for the species is not present in the area, or portions of the area can be occupied without affecting a particular species. Exceptions would also be considered for interim and final reclamation.

**Greater Sage-Grouse** – The BLM would not authorize new surface-disturbing or disruptive activities within 1/4 mile of active leks, nor would it allow new surface-disturbing or disruptive activities within nesting areas (a 2-mile radius of an active lek) from March 1 to June 15. This alternative would not authorize any new surface-disturbing or disruptive activities in active sage-grouse winter habitat from December 1 to March 31.

**Black-tailed Prairie Dog** – New surface-disturbing or disruptive activities would not be authorized within 1/4 mile of prairie dog towns if such activities would adversely impact prairie dogs and/or associated species.

**Designated Sensitive Species** – The BLM may control or exclude any new surface-disturbing or disruptive activities within 1/4 mile of the proposed site or delay such activities for 90 days within identified habitat and within 1/4 mile of active nests. Surface-disturbing or disruptive activities may also be controlled or excluded within 1/2 mile of active ferruginous hawk nests from March 1 to August 1. This determination would be made at the time of authorization and would be based on whether the sensitive species is present in the area of disturbance.

**Bald Eagle** – New surface-disturbing or disruptive activities would not be allowed within 1/2 mile of an eagle nest that has been active in the last seven years if such activities could cause nest abandonment or failure.

**Big Game Winter Range** – New surface-disturbing or disruptive activities would not be allowed on antelope, mule deer and elk winter range from December 1 to March 31. This timeframe could be shortened depending upon weather conditions, animal health and forage availability.

**Bighorn Sheep** – New surface-disturbing or disruptive activities would not be allowed within bighorn sheep distribution areas from December 1 to March 31 or within bighorn sheep lambing areas from April 1 to June 15 if such activities would adversely impact lamb survival.

## Vegetation

*The BLM's goal is to manage for healthy vegetation communities that provide for a wide variety of long-term benefits such as aesthetics, wildlife, recreation, livestock grazing, etc.*

Activity plan updates, such as watershed plans or allotment management plans, would emphasize riparian habitat restoration and protection. In areas that have potential to support riparian vegetation BLM would, at its discretion, restore or establish native riparian vegetation.

If the opportunity is available (through the cancellation or relinquishment of a grazing permit or acquisition of additional land) the BLM could establish resource reserve grazing allotments. These allotments would be available to offset the impacts of drought or to implement a project such as a prescribed fire that could create a temporary loss of Animal Unit Months (AUMs). The Hay Coulee allotment would be a resource reserve allotment. The grazing regulations also allow for adjusting grazing allotments to incorporate the area in neighboring allotments, accepting of new grazing applications from qualified applicants, reallocation of forage to existing grazing permittees, or temporarily not allocating grazing. In each instance, alternatives would be developed and analyzed in an environmental assessment and followed with decisions in accordance the grazing regulations (43 CFR 4100).

The Monument would be managed to achieve a natural range of native plant associations, including measures to promote conservation of sensitive plant species. Management activities would not be allowed to substantially shift the makeup of native plant communities and associations or disrupt normal succession. However, there would be some circumstances where vegetation communities and associations would be shifted to meet specific management goals or objectives. These circumstances could include prescribed burns to reduce hazardous fuel loads, restoration of some habitat components in the interest of wildlife, treatments to control invasive species, etc.

The BLM would determine the priority for restoring non-native vegetation sites to a native species community. Priority sites would be areas where the natural plant community has been significantly disrupted by surface-disturbing activities and the natural resource values have been lost, or are in jeopardy of being lost, and the site could potentially be restored to a natural state. Priority ranking would be based on an emphasis to control highly invasive non-native species. The BLM would also apply reasonable discretion in establishing priority areas based on the extent and seriousness of the situation and resources available (funding and staffing). To achieve



the vegetation goals outlined during site-specific planning, livestock grazing strategies (adjusting grazing or rest seasons, adjusting stocking rates or stocking densities and the location of supplements), prescribed burning, use of herbicides, and mechanical treatments could be used to manage vegetation communities.

Surface-disturbed areas would be rehabilitated with native grasses, forbs and shrubs to minimize the potential for soil erosion and to provide forage and cover for wildlife and livestock. Non-native plants may be used under special circumstances, such as emergency soil stabilization or to establish vegetative cover as an interim step to native species.

Reclamation efforts would follow standard operating procedures and Best Management Practices (BMPs). In some areas, disturbed surfaces would be allowed to reclaim naturally. The intent of the reclamation standards would be to minimize erosion and establish native vegetation. If the reclamation effort would reduce the impacts created by previous developments that are non-functional and beyond repair, the BLM could remove and rehabilitate non-functioning reservoirs, pits and water developments in Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) or in other areas where there is viewshed infringement.

## Range Improvements

*The BLM's goal is to manage for healthy vegetation communities that provide for a wide variety of long-term benefits such as aesthetics, wildlife, recreation, livestock grazing, etc.*

The BLM fence specifications would be followed with allowances for certain classes or types of livestock BLM Handbook H-1741-1). Four-wire fences could be authorized if the class or kind of livestock necessitate the need for a more substantial fence. For additional wildlife mitigation, the bottom wire on four wire fences would be 12 1/2 gauge barbless wire placed at least 16 inches above the ground or 18 inches from the ground if barbed. New fences would not have a top wire over 40 inches from the ground and wire stays would not be allowed. When suitable alternatives are available, fences would not be constructed along steep slopes or in dense vegetation, including timber.

The BLM could modify existing fences that are creating barriers to wildlife movement. In isolated cases, the BLM could relocate fences to better fit with topography and management needs.

Any new water developments would be considered on a site-specific basis and would consider the benefits/detriment to all resources. All tanks would have bird

escape ramps installed to reduce the possibility of birds and small mammals drowning. Proposed winter water tanks would be located away from private lands to encourage elk to increase their use of BLM land which, in turn, could reduce depredation on croplands. Decisions about installing water developments would be based on grazing practices and wildlife habitat needs (big game, migratory birds, sage-grouse, amphibians, etc.) within a specific use area. A site should only be developed if the development would improve resource values. Site-specific planning would be used to make these determinations.

## Visual Resources

*The BLM's goal is to protect the cultural landscape (viewshed) and the visual features in the landscape that are identified in the Proclamation.*

The WSAs, portions of the wild segments of the UMNWSR, and the Bodmer landscapes would be designated as Visual Resource Management (VRM) Class I. The remaining portions of the Monument would be designated as VRM Class II, III, or IV. The WSAs would be classified as VRM Class I and managed according to VRM Class I management objectives until such time as Congress decides to designate the area as wilderness or release it for other uses (WO IM No. 2000-096). If the WSAs are determined by Congress as not eligible, they would be managed consistent with adjacent BLM land.

In VRM Class I areas, the BLM may, if necessary, prohibit new surface-disturbing activities if such activities are not designed to meet the intent of the visual quality objectives. Maintenance of existing range improvements and other structures in VRM Class I areas would be allowed.

In the WSAs, the VRM Class I designation would not prevent the construction of structures or maintenance of existing structures that would be allowed in the WSAs under the Interim Management Policy. The VRM objectives are designed to support the IMP guidelines to not impair the natural character of the existing landscape.

For new projects in VRM Class II, Class III and Class IV areas the BLM would reduce the visual contrast on BLM land in the existing landscape by utilizing proper site selection; reducing soil and vegetative disturbance; choice of color; and over time, returning the disturbed area to a seamless, natural landscape. Maintenance of existing range improvements and other structures would be allowed.

## Forest Products

*The BLM's goal is to provide a healthy ecosystem that achieves a sustainable natural variation of vegetation communities.*

Where forest/woodland health is in jeopardy, minimal impact harvesting techniques that are appropriate for soil and topographical conditions may be pursued.

The Monument Manager could designate personal use areas for cutting Christmas trees and firewood. Under a permit, individuals could be allowed to utilize incidental material. The permit would address the specific type of material and conditions under which removal would occur.

## Right-of-Way Corridors, Avoidance Areas and Exclusion Areas

*The BLM's goal is to provide reasonable access for the administrative needs and authorized uses of private landowners, industry and government agencies.*

In addition to the seven utility and transportation corridors that cross the Missouri River, the Klabzuba pipeline on the south side of the river would also be a designated corridor. The corridor for the Klabzuba pipeline would only be on the south side of the river. The pipeline follows the McClelland/Stafford Ferry corridor on the north side of the river.

Four of the utility and transportation corridors would have defined boundaries through the Monument. The corridors would be 1 mile wide and on BLM land would have defined boundaries within 1/2 mile of the centerline of the following roads and pipeline: the McClelland (Lloyd)/Stafford Ferry road; DY Trail/Power Plant Ferry road; and the Klabzuba pipeline.

The corridor for State Secondary Highway 236 would be about 2 miles wide on the south side of the Missouri

River, which includes the original road along the Judith River and the new route on Claggett Hill. However, the width of this corridor would be reduced to 1 mile when the two roads converge at the top of Reed Hill.

The corridors at Fort Benton, Loma, Virgelle and Highway 191 would retain their current status (1 mile wide). These four corridors extend from bank to bank where they cross the UMNWSR and do not involve any BLM land.

The corridors would be available to all uses (pipelines, transmission/power lines, roads, etc.) with the appropriate mitigation. If feasible, future utilities would be located adjacent to existing roads within the designated corridors or restricted to the least intrusive disturbance.

Within the DY Trail/Power Plant corridor, pipelines would be bored under the Missouri River to avoid river channel disturbance. Boring would not be allowed during the spawning season from March 30 to July 15. Overhead power and/or telephone lines would be allowed to cross the Missouri River to avoid disturbance to spawning sensitive species (sauger, paddlefish, and sturgeon).

Avoidance areas for rights-of-way (ROWs) would include the scenic sections of the UMNWSR, the Bodmer Landscapes, the Cow Creek Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC), cultural/historic sites, riparian and wetland areas, areas containing unique geologic formations, areas considered unsuitable due to erosion and slope, and sage-grouse seasonal habitat where impacts could not be mitigated or effectively controlled. If the WSAs are not designated by Congress as wilderness and are released from WSA status, they would be managed as avoidance areas.

Exclusion areas would include the wild sections of the UMNWSR and the six WSAs, pending determinations by Congress.

Utility and Transportation Corridors in the Monument	
<i>River Mile</i>	<i>Utility and Transportation Corridor</i>
River Mile 0 to 1	<b>Highway 80</b> - State Highway 80 from Fort Benton to Stanford crosses the UMNWSR at Fort Benton. The road is located entirely on private land. At this location the Monument extends only from bank to bank along the UMNWSR.
River Mile 20 to 21	<b>Loma</b> - A buried telephone line (M59069) parallels the county road (M78762) that connects Loma with Geraldine. The telephone and road cross a small portion of BLM land in Section 18, T25N R10E. At this location the Monument extends only from bank to bank along the UMNWSR.
River Mile 38.5 to 39.5	<b>Virgelle Ferry</b> - A power line is located where the Ferry crosses the UMNWSR at Virgelle and does not encumber BLM land. At this location the Monument extends only from bank to bank along the UMNWSR.

River Mile 88 to 89	<b>Secondary Highway 236</b> - Secondary Highway 236 extends southeast from Big Sandy and across the PN Bridge to Winifred. A power line (M59070) and an underground telephone line (M39347A) are located along this road and cross several miles of BLM land on the south side of the Missouri River. The defined corridor extends one-half mile either side of the road centerline on BLM land north of the River. On the south side of the River, the corridor encompasses both the original county road along the Judith River and the new county road on Claggett Hill for a width of about 2 miles where they cross BLM land. Where the two roads converge at the top of Reed Hill, the corridor width is reduced to one-half mile either side of the road centerline on BLM land.
River Mile 101 to 102	<b>McClelland/Stafford Ferry</b> - The McClelland (Lloyd)/Stafford Ferry road that connects Chinook with Winifred crosses BLM land both north and south of the Missouri River. A power line (M24219) that provides power to the Ferry runs parallel to the road on BLM land on the south side of the Monument. The corridor extends one-half mile either side of the road centerline on BLM land north and south of the River.
River Mile 103.5 to 104.5	<b>Klabzuba</b> - The Klabzuba natural gas pipeline M41268 follows the McClelland (Lloyd)/Stafford Ferry road north of the Missouri River. The corridor would include BLM land south of the Missouri River. The corridor extends one-half mile either side of the pipeline.
River Mile 131.5 to 132.5	<b>DY Trail/Power Plant</b> - The DY Trail crosses BLM land and accesses the south bank of the Missouri River in Fergus County across from the old Power Plant Ferry location. The Bull Creek/Power Plant Ferry road crosses BLM land in Phillips County and leads south to the abandoned ferry location on the north bank of the Missouri River. No utilities are located along these roads. The corridor extends one-half mile either side of the road centerline on BLM land north and south of the River.
River Mile 148.5 to 149.5	<b>Highway 191</b> - U.S. Highway 191 (M013368) extends from Malta to Grass Range crossing the Monument near its eastern boundary. A power line (M052239) and a buried telephone line (M049342) parallel the highway; both are located on about a mile of Corps of Engineers land that is leased by the BLM, east of the highway in this area.

## Land Ownership Adjustment

The following BLM land is identified for disposal by exchange and meets the criteria discussed in Decisions Common to All Alternatives: T22N R16E, E2NE4 of Section 15 (80 acres). The parcel is on the edge of the Monument, contains minimal Breaks topography, and contains no objects for which the Monument was designated. The BLM land would be exchanged for private land identified as T22N R15E, Section 3, Lot 5 (24.60 acres) and Section 4, Lot 8 (46.52 acres). This land exchange proposal was initiated by the private landowner in March 2002.

## Fire Management

*The BLM's goal is to manage wildland fire safely, efficiently and with minimal impact to resource values while minimizing the risk of catastrophic fire within the Monument and communities adjacent to the Monument. This includes maintaining or reestablishing the natural influence of fire on vegetation communities and associations.*

The Monument includes four fire management units: Wild and Scenic River, Wilderness Study Areas, North Monument and South Monument.

The BLM's response would be based on a wide range of fire management tools available and more management flexibility to respond to changing conditions. The wildland fire suppression options and prescribed fire options for the fire management units (FMUs) are shown in the table on the next page.

The appropriate management response to all wildland fires would be based on firefighter and public safety and resource values on BLM, state, and private land while considering the natural role of fire. Fires could be managed with less than full suppression efforts and, in most cases, allowed to burn to natural barriers or roads. The cost of suppression would also be considered. Resource values, such as sage-grouse habitat, would be protected during wildland fire suppression through the knowledge of resource advisors assigned to wildland fire incidents and/or information on the location of critical resource areas available to incident commanders; however, protection for resource values would be secondary to life safety and property values.

Prescribed fires could be used in three of the FMUs (Wilderness Study Areas, North Monument and South Monument) based on the flexibility to respond to changing conditions and the goal of returning fire to a more natural role on the Monument landscape.

Prescribed fire in the Wild and Scenic River FMU would be based on public safety and resource issues.

Wildland and Prescribed Fire Options		
<i>Fire Management Unit</i>	<i>Wildland Fire Suppression Strategy</i>	<i>Prescribed Fire Use Based On</i>
Wild and Scenic River	Appropriate	Safety and Habitat
Wilderness Study Areas	Appropriate	Natural Role of Fire
North Monument	Appropriate	Natural Role of Fire
South Monument	Appropriate	Natural Role of Fire

### Wild and Scenic Rivers (Eligible Stream Segments: Cow Creek, Eagle Creek and Dog Creek)

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (Pub. L. 90-542 as amended; 16 U.S.C. 1271-1287) established a method for providing federal protection for certain of our country's remaining free-flowing rivers, preserving them and their immediate environments for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. Including a river in the system provides protective management and controls development.

The BLM inventoried 66 streams and found three streams eligible for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers system: Cow Creek, Eagle Creek, and Dog Creek. These three streams were found to be free-flowing and possessed one or more outstandingly remarkable values.

The BLM would not recommend the three eligible stream segments as suitable for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers system. Management for each area would be provided by the guidance in the Monument RMP.

## Visitor Use, Services and Infrastructure

### Recreation

*The BLM's goal is to manage for a variety of sustainable visitor opportunities in mostly primitive and natural landscapes.*

This section addresses management for the entire Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument and would apply to all the recreation management areas.

**Recreation Management Areas** – The Monument would be included in two special recreation management areas (SRMAs): Upper Missouri River SRMA and Uplands SRMA. The Upper Missouri River SRMA includes BLM land from Fort Benton downstream to Arrow Creek and the entire UMNWSR. The Uplands SRMA includes BLM land both north and south of the UMNWSR downstream from Arrow Creek to the James Kipp Recreation Area.

**Fees** – The BLM would implement an expanded amenity fee for overnight camping in Level 1 sites and an individual special recreation permit for boating the Missouri River. After the RMP is completed the BLM would develop a business plan to determine the actual fee amounts charged for new sites. Development of the business plan would involve the Central Montana RAC and include an opportunity for public involvement. Fees would not be charged until completion of the business plan, except for the fee system for the James Kipp Recreation Area.

Level 1 recreation sites would provide at least a majority of the following: tent or trailer spaces, picnic tables, drinking water, access roads, collection by an employee or agent, reasonable visitor protection, refuse containers, toilet facilities and simple devices for containing a fire. Level 1 sites currently include Wood Bottom, Coal Banks Landing, Judith Landing, Lower Woodhawk and the James Kipp Recreation Area. An expanded amenity fee would be charged at any additional Level 1 sites that may be constructed. In addition, the BLM may charge fees for use of some existing structures in the Monument, including cabins and corrals, consistent with the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA).

A permit and associated fee would be required to boat on the UMNWSR. BLM regulations (43 CFR 2930) specify permits may be required for individual recreational use of special areas. Special areas include rivers in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. The cost of the permit would be established through a business plan based on the cost of operating the permit system, special costs related to management of the area, comparability with other agencies and similar special areas, and fairness and equity among all users. Camping overnight at Level 1 expanded amenity fee sites would be included with the special area permit fee. This permit is a separate permit from a commercial activity permit.

Expanded amenity fees collected for camping would be returned to the Lewistown Field Office and used at Level 1 sites for expenditure on site maintenance and visitor services as established in FLREA.

Fees associated with the special area permit to boat the Missouri River would be returned to the Lewistown Field Office and used to cover management costs associated with toilet pumping, trash collection, and site

maintenance. In addition, fees could be used to support county emergency services and to purchase short-term campsite easements or leases from willing private landowners.

**Gateway Communities** – The BLM would encourage and sustain collaborative partnerships, volunteers and citizen-centered public service. The BLM would partner with gateway communities to provide visitor information.

The BLM would encourage private sector initiatives as a means of developing river visitor use opportunities. The Monument offers a wide range of visitor opportunities, only some of which can be provided by the BLM. To overcome these limitations, non-governmental entities, either individuals or institutions, could help accomplish initiatives compatible with the Monument. These initiatives would not result in permanent facilities in the Monument.

A wide variety of activities can be generated by private sector initiatives. Services for boats or horses, overnight or extended-stay lodging facilities, food/water and other provision sales and guiding are services traditionally offered in this way. Other opportunities may be created by using the Monument for touring and instructional purposes and for expanded regional promotional activities. A special recreation permit must be issued for all commercial and competitive activities that make a profit from recreational visitor activities on BLM land.

Currently, the BLM, City of Fort Benton, and The River and Plains Society are partners in the Missouri Breaks Interpretive Center. The City of Fort Benton will assist with maintenance of the grounds and The River and Plains Society will provide seasonal staffing and volunteers during the summer months as well as manage the center's gift store.

**Research, Collection and Special Events** – The BLM would authorize archaeological and historical investigations. Prehistoric sites would be evaluated and then monitored, protected or excavated based on their scientific value and what they can add to knowledge and interpretation of the Monument. Historic sites would be evaluated and then monitored or maintained based on their historic value, the attraction they have for visitors and their use as safety shelters.

The BLM would allow and authorize paleontological research. All BLM land is closed to commercial collecting of paleontological resources under existing policy and regulation (BLM Manual 8270). Permits are issued to accredited institutions to conduct activity on BLM land to ensure that the resource is used for public display and education purposes only. Scientific use allows for survey/reconnaissance or limited excavation

work with a minimum amount of surface disturbance, as long as such work is conducted under a paleontological permit and maintains the values for which the Monument was established.

The surface collection of common invertebrate fossils and petrified wood for personal use would be authorized and allowed, as limited by the regulations (43 CFR 3620 and 8365), except in the Cow Creek ACEC, Cow Creek WSA, and Dog Creek WSA. It is permissible to collect reasonable amounts of nonrenewable resources such as rocks, mineral specimens, common invertebrate fossils and semiprecious gemstones (43 CFR 8365.1-5(b)(2)). The maximum quantity of petrified wood that any one person is allowed to remove is 25 pounds in weight plus one piece, provided that the maximum total amount that one person may remove in one calendar year does not exceed 250 pounds (43 CFR 3622.4(1)). In the Cow Creek ACEC, Cow Creek WSA, and Dog Creek WSA the collection of common invertebrate fossils and petrified wood would be prohibited. Exceptions could include collections authorized by permit in conjunction with authorized research or management activities.

The personal collection of plant material (e.g., vegetation, seeds and berries) would be authorized and allowed as limited by the regulations (43 CFR 8365). It is permissible to collect reasonable amounts of commonly available renewable resources such as flowers, berries, nuts, seeds, cones and leaves (43 CFR 8365.1-5(b)(1)). Commercial collection of plant materials would not be allowed without a specific permit.

The use of metal detectors would be allowed by permit only. A permit for metal detector use may be authorized by the Monument Manager when determined to be in the interest of the public and consistent with the goals of the Monument. Metal detectors, magnetometers or other remote sensing equipment may also be allowed for administrative purposes or public health and safety uses as determined by the Monument Manager.

Special recreation permit applications for organized group activities or events may be granted, if the activity would not impact the resources or values for which the Monument was designated. Large group events would be authorized subject to restrictions to protect resources. These restrictions may include, but would not be limited to, the designation of specific roads or trails for a particular event, limitations on parking, use of campfires, sanitation requirements and the number of people involved in the event.

The BLM may also issue permits for commercial hiking, horseback riding and other commercial recreation activities that are not associated with big game hunting or river boating.

**Recreation in Sensitive Wildlife Habitat** – The BLM would allow the personal collection of shed antlers (horn hunting).

Camping would not be allowed on BLM islands from April 1 to July 31, to protect wildlife during sensitive periods (e.g., nesting, brooding periods).

**Interpretive Sites** – Historic, archaeological, and geological opportunities on BLM land would be enhanced by developing the interpretive potential at selected sites. Small, low-key interpretive signs that blend in with the surroundings (and not visible from the Missouri River) would be established at specific sites. These low-key sites would be for dispersed recreation opportunities. Simple markers would be provided for some cultural sites. Portable interpretation (guidebooks and brochures) may also be available.

Topics for interpretation would be selected based on setting, visitor benefits and the potential to provide the area's history or prehistory via interpretation. Some potential cultural sites for interpretation would include Decision Point; Eagle Creek; the Murray/PN dugout; Hagadone, Middleton, Ervin, Gist, Cable, and Nelson homesteads, Gilmore cabin; Nez Perce Trail; and sites associated with the Lewis and Clark Expedition. Other possible interpretive sites and topics could include prehistoric sites and the steamboat era on the Missouri River.

Some potential geological interpretive sites would include the stratigraphic cross section of the Missouri River from Virgelle to the James Kipp Recreation Area showing the regional dip of beds starting in Colorado Shale and ending in Bearpaw Shale; the glacial geomorphology and paleo channel of the Missouri River at Little Sandy Creek; the igneous dike known as the Grand Natural Wall from the Lewis and Clark Journal entry; Hole-in-the-Wall; the Big Sag at Judith Landing; the Sugarloaf Rock fault plane versus bedding plane at McClelland/Stafford Ferry; the diatrema at Gist Bottom; and the invertebrate paleo site at Woodhawk.

## **Upper Missouri River Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA)**

*The BLM's goal is to manage these lands for a variety of sustainable visitor experiences in mostly primitive and natural landscapes. This goal would allow BLM to provide dispersed and developed recreation opportunities and ensure that visual quality characteristics reflect a predominantly primitive or natural landscape while providing a diversity of visitor experiences.*

This section addresses specific management of the Upper Missouri SRMA that primarily includes management of the UMNWSR.

**Special Recreation Permits** – There would be a limit of 23 special recreation permits (SRPs) for commercial recreational use on the Missouri River and related land in the UMNWSR. An SRP, with a fee, would be required (43 CFR 2930). Permits help the BLM manage river use to prevent damage to BLM land or water resource values and to prevent social conflicts. The 23 permits would include boating on the Missouri River for commercial hunting, fishing, and scenic and interpretive tours.

One-time permits, authorizing one trip per season, would be issued on a case-by-case basis primarily for institutions and organized groups that meet BLM's definition of commercial use (recreational use of the Missouri River and related land in the UMNWSR for business or financial gain). One-time permits may also be issued to river-based commercial hunting, fishing and scenic and interpretive tour operators not allowed under the 23 permits. One-time permits would authorize a specific use to take place on a specified range of dates within a given calendar year, and would not guarantee authorization for future occupancy and use of the Missouri River and related land in the UMNWSR.

Special events, such as competitive and organized group events, where the event takes place on the river, would be permitted only in the recreation classified segments of the UMNWSR.

Vending permits could be issued in association with special permitted events. Vending permits are temporary, nonexclusive, revocable authorizations. Any facilities associated with the permit would be temporary in nature and confined to Level 1 sites (developed public access sites). Vending permits for food services, souvenirs or clothing, other than those associated with a special event, would not be allowed.

Vending permits could also be issued for shuttle services, boat and equipment rental and other services that directly support or enhance BLM's goals for visitor use management.

**Opportunities for Boaters** – The BLM would not develop an allocation system for visitor use on the Missouri River. The BLM would monitor conditions and develop management actions, as necessary, to reduce impacts to resource and social conditions without limiting the number of people boating the Missouri River. Management actions may include, but would not be limited to, further restrictions on group size, limits on the number of nights allowed at one site, designated campsites, closure of campsites, construction of additional facilities, and development of additional dispersed campsites. Standards and Indicators (Appendix Q) establish a broad framework for managing visitor use and impacts to resources and social conditions. As monitoring confirms change in visitor use patterns and impacts, or as populations shift or other

major social events occur that may dramatically change use patterns, additional refinement within those standards and indicators may become necessary.

From June 15 to August 1 at Coal Banks and Judith Landing, groups larger than 20 people could only launch on Wednesday, Thursday or Friday. Groups larger than 30 people would require a special recreation permit, year round, for boating the Missouri River.

**Camping Facilities** – The existing camping facilities would remain at the current campsites along the Missouri River. Additional Level 1 and 2 sites would only be considered from Fort Benton downstream to Judith Landing. To provide dispersed recreation opportunities and benefits, additional Level 1 sites would be constructed only in the recreation segments of the UMNWSR. Improvements to existing Level 1 and 2 sites could occur to improve infrastructure or address visitor use issues.

Additional Level 2 sites could be constructed between Fort Benton and Judith Landing as necessary to improve resource conditions, improve distribution of visitor use or resolve visitor use conflicts. Associated facilities and construction could not detract from the visual character and integrity of the UMNWSR. No additional Level 2 sites would be constructed below Judith Landing. Additional Level 3 campsites could be added as needed to accommodate increases in use, disperse visitor use along the Missouri River, and rest or rotate the use of individual sites. Dispersed camping (Level 4 opportunities) would be allowed on all BLM land.

The BLM would maintain all developed sites. New capital improvements would be allowed if impacts to cultural and natural resources could be mitigated to an acceptable level. All improvements would comply with the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, as amended.

If the opportunity is available, the BLM would purchase short-term (1-5 year) campsite easements or leases from willing private landowners for alternative or additional campsites to provide dispersed camping opportunities and benefits.

The BLM would implement a 2-night limit at Level 2 campsites from June 15 to August 1. The BLM would maintain the 14-night limit at Level 1 and 3 sites and for dispersed camping (Level 4 opportunities).

The BLM would implement a Leave No Trace program and require the use of camp stoves, fire pans or fire mats for dispersed camping (Level 4 opportunities).

Signing in Level 1 sites could be used to safely direct traffic, provide information, or provide interpretive messages. Signing should be commensurate with visual surroundings and level of development. Signing located

along the Missouri River would identify campsites and would be of minimum size and only used at Level 1, 2 and 3 campsites. Level 4 sites would not be signed. Signing within campsites and elsewhere within the UMNWSR would be limited to existing infrastructure and of sufficiently low profile to not be visible from the river.

**Motorized Watercraft** – The BLM would revise the current seasonal boating restrictions on the Missouri River. The recreation segments of the UMNWSR would be open to motorized watercraft year round except personal watercraft and floatplanes would only be allowed on river miles 0 to 3 near Fort Benton.

The wild segment from Pilot Rock to Deadman Rapids would have a seasonal restriction from June 15 to September 15 with downstream travel only at a no-wake speed. Personal watercraft and floatplanes would not be allowed on this segment of the river yearlong.

The wild and scenic segments from Holmes Council Island to Fred Robinson Bridge would have a seasonal restriction from June 15 to September 15. Motorized watercraft traveling downstream at a no-wake speed would be allowed on Thursdays through Saturdays. On Sundays through Wednesdays motorized watercraft travel would not be allowed. Personal watercraft and floatplanes would not be allowed on this segment of the river yearlong.

Administrative use of motorized watercraft would occur during the seasonal restrictions. A cooperative effort among agencies operating on the river would be initiated. A Memorandum of Understanding would be developed with the goal of achieving uniform standard operating procedures designed to minimize impacts to boaters from administrative use of motorized watercraft.

Livestock grazing permittees would be allowed upstream travel to administer their grazing permit with prior notification to the BLM. Prior notification would be verbal for unplanned situations or by a letter from BLM to the permittee for activities known in advance. Verbal notification could be with the Lewistown Field Office (Monument Manager, Field Manager, or acting) or the Fort Benton River Management Station (Park Ranger). Prior notification allows the BLM to inform boaters at launch points that administrative use may be occurring along specific sections of the river and to respond to boaters' questions concerning administrative use.

There would be no restrictions for any military, fire, search and rescue, or law enforcement watercraft used for emergency purposes. This includes the use of motorized watercraft by the public for emergency purposes and the landing and take-off of floatplanes for safety reasons, such as avoiding inclement weather.

Use of Motorized Watercraft on the Upper Missouri River	
<i>River Segment</i>	<i>Motorized Use</i>
River Mile 0 to 52 Fort Benton – Pilot Rock (Recreation Segment)	Motorized watercraft travel both upstream and downstream would be allowed yearlong.  The operation of personal watercraft and landing of floatplanes would only be allowed on river miles 0 to 3 yearlong.
River Mile 52 to 84.5 Pilot Rock – Deadman Rapids (Wild Segment)	Motorized watercraft travel downstream at a no-wake speed would be allowed from June 15 to September 15.  Motorized watercraft travel both upstream and downstream would be allowed the remainder of the year, from September 16 to June 14.  The operation of personal watercraft and landing of floatplanes would not be allowed yearlong.
River Mile 84.5 to 92.5 Deadman Rapids to Holmes Council Island (Recreation Segment)	Motorized watercraft travel both upstream and downstream would be allowed yearlong.  The operation of personal watercraft and landing of floatplanes would not be allowed yearlong.
River Mile 92.5 to 149 Holmes Council Island to Fred Robinson Bridge (Wild and Scenic Segments)	Motorized watercraft travel downstream at a no-wake speed would be allowed on Thursdays through Saturdays from June 15 to September 15.  Motorized watercraft travel would not be allowed on Sundays through Wednesdays from June 15 to September 15.  Motorized watercraft travel both upstream and downstream would be allowed the remainder of the year, from September 16 to June 14.  The operation of personal watercraft and landing of floatplanes would not be allowed yearlong.

## Uplands Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA)

*The BLM's goal is to manage these lands for a variety of sustainable visitor experiences in mostly primitive and natural landscapes. This goal would allow BLM to provide dispersed and developed recreation opportunities and ensure that visual quality characteristics reflect a predominantly primitive or natural landscape while providing a diversity of visitor experiences.*

This section addresses specific management for the Uplands SRMA that primarily includes management for the BLM land outside of the UMNWSR.

**Special Recreation Permits** – The BLM would provide SRPs for commercial outfitting and guiding (hunting) in the Monument consistent with 43 CFR 2932.26 and the goal of managing these lands for a variety of sustainable visitor experiences in mostly primitive and natural landscapes. Outfitters and other recreational users would

be required to use weed-free feed on BLM land for their livestock as a part of the integrated weed management program.

It is the BLM's goal to provide quality recreational opportunities that serve the public interest via authorized commercial operators for visitors lacking the skill or equipment necessary to otherwise participate. To meet this goal, a management approach may be developed through activity level planning that is responsive to changing visitor use trends, use patterns, and resource conditions. While the current use levels for the upland SRPs appear to be adequate, visitor demand for commercial hunting and guiding services could increase in the future.

Visitor use data would be collected and analyzed with the results incorporated into future management decisions. Visitor use data includes hunter/client use days and areas of use. Social conflicts with the general public, as well as conflicts between or among outfitters would also be taken into consideration. In addition, should visitor use levels increase, patterns of use change,



or if permitted areas are not used, it may be necessary to decrease the number of permits, adjust use areas, incorporate conditions limiting net hunter/client use days (visitor use days). Conversely, it may be necessary to increase the number of permits due to demand or other conditions.

Activity level planning would be developed through an environmental review process and public involvement. Activity level planning would be based on BLM's 2930 Recreation Permit Administrative Handbook, BLM's Montana Outfitter Management Guidelines, the 1997 Memorandum of Understanding with the Montana Board of Outfitters (BLM MOU MT932-9111), and the Lewistown Field Office/Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument Commercial Outfitter and Guide Policy. This management approach would identify the necessary indicators to monitor outfitter conditions of approval that include the standards and stipulations that could require a change in operations. Such management actions are necessary to enhance visitor use opportunities and protect resource values.

The BLM could issue special recreation permits for commercial motorized tours. Motorized tours would be restricted to two vehicles or less per day for each commercial permit on local, collector and some identified resource roads.

The BLM may also issue permits for commercial hiking, horseback riding and other commercial recreation activities that are not associated with big game hunting or river boating.

**Camping Facilities** – The BLM would consider developing Level 1 campsites, but they would only be constructed at the beginning of public access roads into the Monument. These sites could include interpretive kiosks. The BLM would encourage private landowners outside the Monument to develop Level 1 sites and services. Level 2 campsites would be park and explore sites where people could walk from designated parking areas. Level 3 sites would be pullout sites immediately adjacent to a road. Fire rings would be the only allowable development at these sites. The BLM would implement a Leave No Trace program and encourage the use of camp stoves, fire pans or fire mats for dispersed camping (Level 4 opportunities).

Signing in the uplands would be limited to Level 1 sites commensurate with visual surroundings and level of development. Signing could be used as necessary at Level 2 sites, but only within new or existing infrastructure. No other signing would be used within the uplands except for required transportation system signs.

## Natural Gas Exploration and Development

### Oil and Gas

*The BLM's goal is to provide reasonable oil and gas exploration and development on existing leased land without diminishing the objects of the Monument.*

The Proclamation does not allow new oil and gas leases in the Monument. The 43 federal oil and gas leases in the Monument are considered to have valid existing rights based on the Proclamation that states, "The establishment of this monument is subject to valid existing rights. The Secretary of Interior shall manage development on existing oil and gas leases within the monument, subject to valid existing rights, so as not to create any new impacts that would interfere with the proper care and management of the objects protected by this proclamation." The existing leases are also in compliance with their lease terms and conditions.

In March 2000, the Montana Wilderness Association (MWA) filed suit challenging BLM's issuance of three leases that are now included in the Monument, alleging the BLM did not fully comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Endangered Species Act (ESA) and National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). The leases involved in the suit, as well as nine others in the Monument were based on the BLM's 1988 West HiLine RMP. In March 2004, the United States District Court for the District of Montana, Great Falls Division, ruled in favor of the Plaintiffs and ordered the BLM to:

- Prepare an EIS for the oil and gas leasing program that covers the three leases.
- Prepare a valid biological assessment of the oil and gas leasing program in conjunction with the EIS.
- Consult with all required entities.

Under the order, all surface-disturbing activity on the three leases is prohibited pending completion of the appropriate environmental reviews. In January 2006 the District Court enjoined activity on the three leases until BLM could demonstrate compliance with the directives set forth in the March 2004 order. In light of the court's ruling, the BLM believes all 12 Monument leases based on the West HiLine RMP should be analyzed in this Monument RMP. To fully comply with the January 2006 court order this RMP also addresses a no lease alternative for the 12 West HiLine leases. The no lease alternative is addressed as a subalternative, Alternative E<sub>NL</sub> which would not allow surface disturbance or the processing of APDs. The BLM will not process any

further applications for permits to drill (APDs) on any leases in the Monument until the RMP is completed (BLM 2002d).

Leases issued for federal minerals include stipulations that apply to the exploration and development activity that might be proposed during the lease term. Existing resources should be taken into consideration before oil and gas lease activity is permitted. Over the last 36 years of issuing leases within what is now the Monument, eight stipulation forms were used. Many of the early leases (May 1967 through September 1971) contained no stipulations beyond the standard terms of the lease; the majority of the leases issued after July 1972 included stipulations with provisions for wildlife, cultural resources, rough terrain and threatened and endangered species, should they be present on the lease. All oil and gas lease activities would be subject to existing laws (e.g., Clean Water Act, Endangered Species Act, and National Historic Preservation Act) regardless of the age of the lease or the stipulations attached to the lease.

The oil and gas leases in the Monument can be divided into two categories: leases issued under the West HiLine RMP, and non-West HiLine RMP leases. Some of the leases are located both within and outside of the Monument. The range of alternatives for the leases in the Monument (42,805 acres) focuses on the conditions of approval necessary during the APD process to protect the objects. Current stipulations (Form 3109-1, and others for the older leases) would apply to portions of the leases located outside of the Monument (25,097 acres) along with other site-specific conditions determined during the permitting process.

## Oil and Gas Lease Stipulations and Conditions of Approval

The conditions of approval include specific conditions for timing, controlled surface use, and surface-disturbing or disruptive activities. The lease stipulations and conditions of approval only apply to federal minerals. These restrictions do not apply to private minerals adjacent to or intermingled with federal minerals.

The existing lease stipulations would be strengthened by implementing reasonable conditions of approval under BLM's authority to protect the objects in the Monument. The conditions of approval would apply to all the oil and gas lease acreage (42,805 acres) in the Monument. The conditions of approval would be applied to the APD after an onsite evaluation indicates the presence of the specific resource and after considering the waivers, exceptions and modifications. The current APD review process would be utilized, which includes a 30-day posting period for public review of the proposal. The current stipulations (Form 3109-1) would apply to the portions

of five of the 12 West HiLine leases that are outside the Monument (2,454 acres).

Seasonal or distance restrictions would be placed on oil and gas activities to protect sage-grouse nesting areas and winter habitat, active ferruginous hawk nests, big game winter range, and bighorn sheep distribution and bighorn sheep lambing areas.

### ***Timing – Alternative F***

*Greater Sage-Grouse Nesting Zone* – Surface-disturbing or disruptive activities would be prohibited from March 1 to June 15 in sage-grouse nesting habitat within 2 miles of a lek. Travel on identified designated roads may include these timing restrictions or limited site visits.

*Greater Sage-Grouse Winter Habitat* – Surface-disturbing or disruptive activities would be prohibited from December 1 to March 31 within winter habitat for sage-grouse. This condition would not apply to the operation and maintenance of production facilities. Travel on identified designated roads may include these timing restrictions or limited site visits.

*Ferruginous Hawk* – Surface-disturbing or disruptive activities would be prohibited from March 1 to August 1 within 1/2 mile of active ferruginous hawk nest sites.

*Big Game Winter Range* – Surface-disturbing or disruptive activities would be prohibited from December 1 to March 31 within winter range for elk, mule deer, and antelope. Travel on identified designated roads may include these timing restrictions or limited site visits.

*Bighorn Sheep Distribution* – Surface-disturbing or disruptive activities would be prohibited from December 1 to March 31 within bighorn sheep distribution areas. Travel on identified designated roads may include these timing restrictions or limited site visits.

*Bighorn Sheep Lambing Areas* – Surface-disturbing or disruptive activities would be prohibited from April 1 to June 15 within bighorn sheep lambing areas. Travel on identified designated roads may include these timing restrictions or limited site visits.

Controlled surface use conditions would be applied to protect black-tailed prairie dogs, designated sensitive species, most soils, visual resources in VRM Class II, III and IV areas and cultural resources.

### ***Controlled Surface Use – Alternative F***

***Black-tailed Prairie Dogs*** – Surface-disturbing or disruptive activities may be controlled or excluded within 1/4 mile of prairie dog towns, if an activity would adversely impact prairie dogs and/or associated species.

***Designated Sensitive Species*** – Surface-disturbing or disruptive activities may be controlled or excluded within 1/4 mile of the proposed site or the activity delayed 90 days within identified crucial habitat or active nests.

***Soils/Steep Slopes*** – Prior to surface-disturbing activities on slopes 30% and greater or on slopes 20% and greater with severely erosive and/or slumping soils, a certified engineering and reclamation plan must be approved by the authorized officer. This plan must demonstrate how the following would be accomplished:

- Site productivity would be restored.
- Surface runoff would be adequately controlled.
- The site and adjacent areas would be protected from accelerated erosion, such as rilling, gully, piping, slope failure, and mass wasting.
- Nearby watercourses would be protected from sedimentation. Water quality and quantity would be in conformance with state and federal water quality laws.
- Surface-disturbing activities would not be conducted during extended wet periods.
- Construction or reclamation would not be allowed when soils are frozen.

The operator must also provide an evaluation of past practices on similar terrain and be able to demonstrate success under similar conditions.

***Visual Resource Management (VRM) Classes II, III and IV*** – All surface disturbing activities, semi-permanent and permanent facilities in VRM Classes II, III and IV would utilize proper site selection; reduction of soil and vegetative disturbance; choice of color; and over time, return the disturbed area to a natural landscape.

***Historic Properties and/or Cultural Resources*** – The affected area may be found to contain historic properties and/or resources protected under the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), American Indian Religious Freedom Act, Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, E.O. 13007, or other statutes and executive orders. The BLM would not approve any ground-disturbing activities that may affect any such properties or resources until it completes its obligations under

applicable requirements of the NHPA and other authorities. The BLM may require modification to exploration or development proposals to protect such properties, or disapprove any activity that is likely to result in adverse effects that cannot be successfully avoided, minimized or mitigated.

Surface-disturbing or disruptive activities would not be allowed in order to protect sage-grouse leks, bald eagle nest sites and nesting habitat, streams and riparian/wetland areas, soils on slopes 40% and greater, visual resources in VRM Class I areas and developed recreation areas.

### ***No Surface-Disturbing or Disruptive Activities – Alternative F***

***Greater Sage-Grouse Leks*** – Surface-disturbing or disruptive activities would be prohibited within 1/4 mile of active sage-grouse leks.

***Bald Eagle Nest Sites and Nesting Habitat*** – Surface-disturbing or disruptive activities would be prohibited within 1/2 mile of known bald eagle nest sites that have been active within the past 7 years, if disturbance could cause nest abandonment or failure.

***Streams, Riparian/Wetland Areas, and 100-Year Floodplains*** – Surface-disturbing activities would be prohibited within 100-year floodplains or within 500 feet of the channels of ephemeral, intermittent, and perennial streams, or within 500 feet of the outer margins of riparian and wetland areas.

***Soils/Steep Slopes*** – Surface-disturbing activities would be prohibited on slopes 40 percent and greater.

***Visual Resource Management (VRM) Class I*** – Surface-disturbing activities would be prohibited in VRM Class I areas.

***Recreation*** – Surface-disturbing activities would be prohibited within the line of sight/sound or 300 feet (whichever is closer) of developed recreation areas (Level 1, 2, and 3 sites) and undeveloped recreation areas receiving concentrated public use. Work-over types of operations would be limited to weekdays, except for emergency situations when operations would be allowed.

## **Natural Gas Operations**

**Seismic Operations** – All seismic activities would be subject to the wildlife, soils, and visual resource mitigation measures discussed earlier in this chapter

along with the BMPs. Other BMPs could be considered and implemented if new techniques or new technology develop over time. Gravity-type surveys would be allowed on road and only by foot off-road.

Vibroseis-type vehicles would be required to stay on existing approved roads. If the existing road system is not adequate to conduct a survey, shallow drill holes (5 to 15 foot shot holes) would be allowed for the remaining part of the survey using helicopter and ground support (via foot).

Vehicle activity would be restricted to designated roads. Exceptions could be authorized on a case-by-case basis dependent upon the degree of data needed to identify the resource, the operator's ability to mitigate surface disturbance, and if the activity would not interfere with the proper care and management of the objects protected by the Monument Proclamation. Seismic operations would follow the current regulations, including 43 CFR 3150 and the 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, 2006 Gold Book.

**Drilling Operations** – Spacing would remain consistent with state spacing requirements and current Board Orders for the Leroy and Sawtooth Mountain Gas Fields. Proposals for increased well densities would be allowed for up to one well site per quarter section, subject to siting criteria (i.e., visual resources, sensitive wildlife species and slope/soil concerns). Any more than one well per quarter section would be directionally drilled from an existing active well location in the quarter section.

Drilling operations would follow current regulations, including 43 CFR 3164.1 Onshore Oil and Gas Order No. 2 (Drilling operations), API recommended practices, BMPs and standard operating procedures including surface operating standards for natural gas exploration and development (BLM and USFS, referred to as the 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, 2006 Gold Book). Other BMPs could be considered and implemented if new techniques or new technology develop over time.

Only the minimal amount of surface disturbance would be permitted for drilling and production phases. The disturbed area would be confined to an acceptable (safe) area/space based on the type of operation. The objectives would be to achieve a desired effect on the land with minimum disturbance by using low impact drilling technology, developing multiple wells from one location or staying away from problem areas. This would include the access to a drilling site. The objectives would be to reduce impacts, avoiding areas that could be subject to high impacts, and locating the operation away from sensitive areas.

Travel on identified designated roads would be restricted to the minimal vehicle size and type needed for the job. Due to resource issues, timing restrictions may be applied to site visits.

**Production Operations, Facilities and Equipment** – Production facilities and equipment would be required to follow standard operating procedures; the 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, 2006 Gold Book, 43 CFR 3164.1 Onshore Oil and Gas Order No. 3 (Site security), No. 5 (Measurement of gas), and No. 7 (Disposal of produced water); and BMPs. Other BMPs could be considered and implemented if new techniques or new technology develop over time.

Prior approval would be required for pipeline installation; compressor installation; water disposal pits including any future increase in size; pumping unit installation; well workovers, that include but are not limited to redrilling, deepening a well, and performing casing repairs or plugbacks; portable tanks for well testing; or other surface disturbance. Prior notification would be required for well cleanout, to replace or repair tubing, recompleting the well in the same interval, and/or routine well stimulation.

Portable tanks for well testing, as required by the BLM, would be temporary (60 to 90 days) and designed to meet VRM objectives in the area including painting and camouflage to blend with the natural surroundings.

Pipeline placement and construction would be restricted to existing disturbance or the least intrusive disturbance (existing roads).

The BLM would require operators to utilize BMPs and wildlife mitigation on all gas compressors for noise control. If feasible, large gas compressors or pumping units (long-term noise producers) would be located outside the Monument.

Gas compressors, pumping units and production infrastructure would be located where they minimize noise and visual impacts and comply with VRM objectives established for the area. The VRM objectives provide standards for the design and development of projects.

Water disposal pits would be sized according to water production with berms into the pit. All containment systems would require wildlife escape ramps and/or netting where necessary. For wells in the Monument, only two trips per month would be authorized to transport water off site. Exceptions would be considered on a case-by-case basis. The operator would have the option to dispose of the water via pipeline to an approved facility, disposal pits including tanks, or in an approved water disposal well if these other options are not viable.

Travel on identified designated roads would be restricted to the minimal vehicle size and type needed for the job. Due to resource issues, timing restrictions may be applied to site visits. For construction and heavy trucks related to production, this alternative would restrict equipment that exceeds 49dB from being within 2 miles

of sage-grouse leks between 4:00 a.m. and 8:00 a.m. and from 7:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. between March 1 and June 15.

**Plugging and Reclamation Operations** – When wells are determined to have no commercial value, they must be plugged according to regulations at 43 CFR 3162.3-4 and 3164.1, Onshore Oil and Gas Order No. 1 (effective May 7, 2007), and Onshore Oil and Gas Order No. 2 that cover minimum requirements for plugging operations for federal wells and the 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, 2006 Gold Book. All federal wells are required to have an approved plugging plan prior to initiating the work to plug the well.

Reclamation efforts would follow BMPs and standard operating procedures. Other BMPs could be considered and implemented if new techniques or new technology develop over time. In some areas, disturbed surfaces (i.e., current wells with final abandonment notices with less than 100% reclamation) would be allowed to reclaim naturally. The intent of the reclamation standards would be to minimize erosion and establish native vegetation.

## Access and Transportation

### Access

*The BLM's goal is to manage legal and physical access to and within the Monument to provide opportunities for diverse activities.*

The BLM would coordinate with state agencies and county governments to improve public access to BLM land. Easements or fee acquisition opportunities would only be considered with willing landowners to enhance the values of the Monument and provide public access to or within the Monument, or additional public access to meet management objectives, including dispersed recreation use.

The BLM would consider building or rerouting roads as necessary for additional public access to large blocks of BLM land. The BLM would cooperate with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks and private landowners to improve recreation access. This may involve participation in block management programs or developing access agreements with willing private landowners.

The BLM would coordinate with the Charles M. Russell (CMR) National Wildlife Refuge to improve recreation access to the east side of the Monument from the James Kipp Recreation Area. The BLM would also coordinate with Blaine County and the Fort Belknap Community Council to improve recreation access across the Cow Island and Timber Ridge roads in the northeast area of the Monument.

New resource roads to natural gas operations would be closed for public access, unless shown to meet management objectives through a site-specific environmental assessment.

Individuals with disabilities could request a permit to travel on closed roads consistent with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Such access would be considered on a case-by-case basis by the Monument Manager. If the need arises, the BLM could identify specific designated closed roads as access for individuals with disabilities.

### BLM Road System

*The BLM's goal is to provide access to state and federal land and reasonable access for private landowners while protecting the features of the Monument. This includes access for administrative needs and authorized uses of industry and government agencies.*

*The BLM's goal is to manage legal and physical public access to and within the Monument to provide opportunities for diverse recreation activities (motorized and non-motorized) while considering the surrounding regional recreation opportunities in north-central Montana. The Monument is a relatively small but significant part of this region and cannot provide opportunities for all recreational activities on all BLM land while protecting the objects for which it was designated.*

Public use of private roads that provide access to BLM land in the Monument must be negotiated with the individual landowners.

The State of Montana provides access to BLM land with seven road segments that cross state land and are currently designated open for public travel. All other State of Montana road segments that provide access to BLM land are currently closed to motorized travel unless covered by a public access easement.

A road is a linear route segment that can be created by the passage of vehicles (two-track); constructed; improved; or maintained for motorized travel. The following specifications were used to determine which routes would be inventoried for the Monument transportation plan:

Motorized travel is not considered cross-country (off road) on BLM land when:

- The motorized vehicle travels on constructed roads that are maintained by the BLM. Constructed roads are often characterized with cut and fill slopes.

- Motorized vehicle use is defined as clearly evident, two-track routes with regular travel and continuous passage of motorized vehicles over a period of years. A two-track is where perennial vegetation is devoid or scarce, or where wheel tracks are continuous depressions in the soil yet evident to the casual observer and are vegetated.

BLM roads are classified into three categories (collector, local and resource roads) and are assigned to one of five maintenance levels. The transportation alternatives include these BLM classifications and maintenance levels as described below.

<b>BLM Road Classifications</b>	
<b>Collector Roads</b>	These Bureau roads normally provide primary access to large blocks of land, and connect with or are extensions of a public road system. Collector roads accommodate mixed traffic and serve many uses. They generally receive the highest volume of traffic of all the roads in the Bureau road system. User cost, safety, comfort, and travel time are primary road management considerations. Collector roads usually require application of the highest standards used by the Bureau. As a result, they have the potential for creating substantial environmental impacts and often require complex mitigation procedures.
<b>Local Roads</b>	These Bureau roads normally serve a smaller area than collectors, and connect to collectors or a public road system. Local roads receive lower volumes, carry fewer traffic types, and generally serve fewer uses. User cost, comfort, and travel time are secondary to construction and maintenance cost considerations. Low volume local roads in mountainous terrain, where operating speed is reduced by effect of terrain, may be single-lane roads with turnouts. Environmental impacts are reduced as steeper grades, sharper curves, and lower design speeds than would be permissible on collector roads are allowable.
<b>Resource Roads</b>	These Bureau roads normally are spur roads that provide point access and connect to local or collector roads. They carry very low volume and accommodate only one or two types of use. Use restrictions are applied to prevent conflicts between users needing the road and users attracted to the road. The location and design of these roads are governed by environmental compatibility and minimizing Bureau costs, with minimal consideration for user cost, comfort, or travel time. This includes two-track roads.

<b>BLM Road Maintenance Levels</b>	
<b>Maintenance Level 1</b>	<p>This level is assigned to roads where minimum maintenance is required to protect adjacent lands and resource values. These roads are no longer needed and are closed to traffic. The objective is to remove these roads from the transportation system.</p> <p>Minimum Maintenance Standard – Emphasis is given to maintaining drainage and runoff patterns as needed to protect adjacent lands. Grading, brushing/tree removal, or slide removal is not performed unless roadbed drainage is being adversely affected, causing erosion. Closure and traffic restrictive devices are maintained.</p>
<b>Maintenance Level 2</b>	<p>This level is assigned to roads where the management objectives require the road to be opened for limited traffic. Typically, these roads are passable by high-clearance vehicles and include two-track roads.</p> <p>Minimum Maintenance Standard – Drainage structures and/or suitable material (e.g., rock or gravel) are to be installed and/or maintained as needed to control runoff, erosion, sedimentation, and rutting. Grading is conducted only in specific locations as necessary to correct drainage problems and erosion. Brushing/tree removal is conducted as needed to allow administrative access. Slides may be left in place provided they do not adversely affect drainage. Known sinkholes would be repaired where they present a safety hazard.</p>

<b>BLM Road Maintenance Levels</b>	
<b>Maintenance Level 3</b>	<p>This level is assigned to roads where management objectives require the road to be open seasonally or year-round for commercial, recreation, or high volume administrative access. Typically, these roads are natural or aggregate surfaced, but may include low use bituminous surfaced roads. These roads have defined cross sections with drainage structures (e.g., rolling dips, culverts, or ditches). These roads may be negotiated by passenger cars traveling at prudent speeds. User comfort and convenience are not considered a high priority.</p> <p>Minimum Maintenance Standard – Drainage structures and/or suitable material (e.g., rock or gravel) are to be installed and/or maintained as needed to control runoff, erosion, sedimentation, and rutting. Grading is conducted only in specific locations as necessary to correct drainage problems and erosion or when ruts in excess of 3 inches are present within the roadbed. Brushing/tree removal is conducted as needed to improve sight distance. Slides adversely affecting drainage would receive high priority for removal; otherwise they will be removed on a scheduled basis. Known sinkholes would be repaired where they present a safety hazard.</p>
<b>Maintenance Level 4</b>	<p>This level is assigned to roads where management objectives require the road to be open all year (except may be closed or have limited access due to snow conditions) and to connect major administrative features (recreation sites, local road systems, administrative sites, etc.) to county, state, or federal roads. Typically, these roads are single or double lane, aggregate or bituminous surface, with a higher volume of commercial and recreational traffic than administrative traffic.</p> <p>Minimum Maintenance Standard – The entire roadway is maintained at least annually, although a preventative maintenance program may be established. Problems are repaired as discovered. These roads may be closed or have limited access due to snow conditions.</p>
<b>Maintenance Level 5</b>	<p>This level is assigned to roads where management objectives require the road to be open all year and are the highest traffic volume roads of the transportation system. None of the BLM roads in the Monument are assigned to this category.</p> <p>Minimum Maintenance Standard – The entire roadway is maintained at least annually, although a preventative maintenance program may be established. Problems are repaired as discovered. These roads may be closed or have limited access due to snow conditions.</p>

BLM roads providing motorized access to the boundary of private land would remain open for public, private landowner and administrative travel with the exception of two roads. One of the closed roads is impassable and is no longer used and the other road is currently limited to administrative access. There are 65 miles of BLM roads providing access to private land that would be designated open yearlong and 2 miles (two roads) that would be designated closed.

BLM roads to the boundary of state land would remain open for administrative travel including state leaseholders. These roads would also be open for public travel, if shown to meet Monument objectives. The BLM would coordinate with state agencies on roads open to the public that lead to or from state land. There are 80 miles of BLM roads providing access to state land.

The BLM's objectives would be to retain roads to access areas commonly used for dispersed recreation (hunting, geological areas, and trailheads), recreation sites (fishing reservoirs, scenic overlooks and historic homesteads), gas well sites, major range improvement projects, and backcountry airstrips.

The BLM would reduce the number of parallel and spur roads and some roads in areas with important wildlife habitat, in areas considered unsuitable due to erosion and slope, and where unique geologic formations, cultural sites or riparian areas are being degraded.

The BLM reserves the option to build new roads if necessary to access blocks of BLM land.

Roads that are designated open or limited (404 miles) would be open to all forms of motorized and mechanized use consistent with management objectives with the

exception of 2 miles of roads identified as backcountry airstrips. The 2 miles of roads identified as backcountry airstrips would be limited to the landing of aircraft; however, the landing of aircraft would not be allowed on the other 402 miles of BLM roads. Some roads designated as closed could be designated as limited to mechanized (e.g., mountain bike) use through site-specific planning and environmental review.

**Road System Criteria** – Objectives and factors were used to determine which roads in the Monument would be open yearlong (293 miles), open seasonally (111 miles), or closed (201 miles). The road system could be modified if vehicle use traffic patterns or resource conditions change. Modifications to the road system would be based on the management guidance under this alternative, including the factors listed in the table below, and changes would be addressed through a travel plan update with public participation and environmental review.

<b>BLM Roads Open Yearlong, Seasonally, or Closed</b>	
<i><b>Designation</b></i>	<i><b>Road Miles</b></i>
Open Yearlong	293
Open Seasonally (Limited)	111
<i>Winter Range</i>	21
<i>Wildlife Habitat Security</i>	69
<i>Winter Range/Habitat Security</i>	12
<i>Erosion</i>	7
<i>Other – Airstrips</i>	2
Closed	201
<i>Erosion</i>	13
<i>Other</i>	3
<i>Parallel Road</i>	37
<i>Recreation</i>	2
<i>Redundant</i>	10
<i>Spur Road</i>	135
<i>Wildlife</i>	1
Total	605

**Road Classification and Maintenance** – Each road segment would be assigned to one of three classifications and a maintenance level that reflects the appropriate management objectives. The classification or maintenance level could be changed if vehicle use patterns change or if resource damage occurs. The BLM may perform maintenance or upgrades to control erosion, or if not possible, either reroute or close the road for erosion control.

The Cow Island, Timber Ridge, Knox Ridge, and James Kipp Recreation Area roads would be classified as collector roads (21 miles). The Wood Bottom, Bullwhacker, Middle Two Calf, Lower Two Calf, Woodhawk Bottom, and Woodhawk Trail roads would be classified as local roads (41 miles). All other roads would be classified as resource roads (543 miles).

The Cow Island and James Kipp Recreation Area roads would be assigned to a Level 4 maintenance category (8 miles). The Wood Bottom, Knox Ridge, Timber Ridge, Bullwhacker, Middle Two Calf, Lower Two Calf, Spencer Cow Camp, and Butch Camp roads would be assigned to a Level 3 maintenance category (56 miles). The remaining open roads would fall under the Level 2 maintenance category (340 miles). A Level 1 maintenance category would be assigned to the 201 miles of closed roads.

The BLM could install cattleguards as needed or where appropriate on roads that are designated open yearlong.

In the future, the BLM section of the PN road (5 miles) would be classified as a local road and assigned to a Level 3 maintenance category.

The BLM roads designated closed would either be allowed to reclaim naturally or selected segments may require ripping, scarifying and seeding with a native seed mix to control surface runoff. The Monument Manager could approve a different seed mixture to meet reclamation standards.

Road Classification and Maintenance Level						
Road ClassificationMiles		Maintenance Level (miles)				
		1	2	3	4	5
Collector	21	0	0	13	8	0
Local	41	0	5	36	0	0
Resource	543	201	335	7	0	0
Total	605	201	340	56	8	0



### **Exceptions for Travel Off Road and on Closed Roads**

– Travel off road and on closed roads would be allowed for any military, fire, search and rescue, or law enforcement vehicle used for emergency purposes.

For administrative purposes travel would be authorized off road and on closed roads for BLM, other federal agencies, state and county agencies, lessees and permittees. Administrative purposes would be limited to those activities necessary to administer the permit or lease. Some examples of administrative purposes are discussed in Alternative A. If a segment of a closed road provides access to a facility and becomes impassable, maintenance could be authorized on a case-by-case basis. There could be some new surface disturbance from road maintenance activities.

Big game retrieval by motorized vehicles would be allowed from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on 81 miles of seasonally closed roads (69 miles closed from September 1 through November 30, and 12 miles closed from September 1 through March 31).

Non-motorized/ non-mechanized game carts would be allowed off road, except in the WSAs, to retrieve a tagged big game animal. Game carts would not be allowed off road in the WSAs.

Outside of the WSAs, motorized or mechanized vehicles may park adjacent to a road to provide a reasonable safe distance for the public to pass. However, parking must be within 50 feet of a road. Parking would be encouraged at previously used sites.

In the WSAs, motorized or mechanized vehicles may only park immediately adjacent to a vehicle way or cherry stem road.

**Signing** – Existing traffic control and directional signs would be maintained. New signs would be added where monitoring indicates a need to enhance safety or prevent

resource damage or visitor confusion. Roads open to motorized and mechanized travel would be signed (small road number signs). Closed roads would not be signed unless necessary to prevent resource damage.

### **Aviation**

*The BLM's goal is to provide access for diverse recreation opportunities while protecting the features in the Monument.*

Six airstrips (selected to avoid clusters) would remain open for private aircraft (planes, helicopters, hot air balloons, or ultralights) to provide opportunities for recreational backcountry activities such as camping, hiking, and sightseeing. The landing of aircraft would only be allowed on these airstrips. The six airstrips are Black Butte North, Bullwhacker, Cow Creek, Knox Ridge, Left Coulee, and Woodhawk. Five of the airstrips would be open yearlong while the Woodhawk airstrip would be restricted seasonally to provide wildlife habitat security during the fall hunting season (September 1 to November 30).

The BLM would allow minimal hand maintenance of airstrips without prior approval, but maintenance would be limited to the area previously disturbed. The emphasis would be to keep the airstrips as backcountry airstrips, only suitable for landing aircraft equipped to use primitive airstrips. Mechanized maintenance, improvements, facilities or infrastructure (tie downs, wind socks, airstrip delineators, etc.) would require prior approval by the authorized officer.

All commercial aircraft landing in the Monument (planes, helicopters, hot air balloons, or ultralights) would be required to utilize specific authorized backcountry airstrips. Seasonal restrictions may apply to the commercial use of these airstrips. Commercial use would require prior authorization.